

Missions played a vital role in frontier development in Latin America throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They were key to the penetration of national societies into the regions and indigenous lands that the nascent republics claimed as their jurisdictions. In *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree*, Erick D. Langer examines one of the most important Catholic mission systems in republican-era Latin America, the Franciscan missions among the Chiriguano Indians in southeastern Bolivia. Using that mission system as a model for understanding the relationship between indigenous peoples and missionaries in the post-independence period, Langer explains how the missions changed over their lifespan and how power shifted between indigenous leaders and the missionaries in an ongoing process of negotiation. *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree* is based on twenty years of research, including visits to the sites of nearly every mission discussed and interviews with descendants of mission Indians, Indian chiefs, Franciscan friars, mestizo settlers, and teachers. Langer chronicles how, beginning in the 1840s, the establishment of missions fundamentally changed the relationship between the Chiriguano villages and national society. He looks at the Franciscan missionariesâ€™ motives, their visions of ideal missions, and the realities they faced. He also examines mission life from the Chiriguano point of view, considering their reasons for joining missions and their resistance to conversion, as well as the interrelated issues of Indian acculturation and the development of the mission economy, particularly in light of the relatively high rates of Indian mortality and outmigration. Expanding his focus, Langer delves into the complex interplay of Indians, missionaries, frontier society, and the national government until the last remaining missions were secularized in 1949. He concludes with a comparative analysis between colonial and republican-era missions throughout Latin America.

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